

MINUTES

Early Childhood Development Task Force

Capitol Annex
West Conference Room 117
514 West Jefferson Street
September 20, 2007

(Subject to approval by the Task Force)

Members present were Senator Tom Gannon, Chairman; Senator Stan Bastian; Senator Tim Corder; Senator Gary Schroeder; and Senator Mike Burkett. Senator Mel Richardson was absent and excused. Ad hoc members present were Mrs. Becky Young; Pat Collins, Hawley Troxell Ennis & Hawley LLP; Stan Burton, Executive Director of Idaho Head Start; and Joyce Anderson, BYU-Idaho.

Other persons present included Tom Rane, Owen Anderson and Mike Godfrey, BYU-Idaho; Tony Wilkerson, Idaho Criminal Justice Commission; Melissa Bandy and Brenda Breidinger, Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children; Representative Steven Thayne; Representative Branden Durst; Michael McEvoy; Erin Bennett, Idaho Library Association; Ann Joslin and Erin Hasler, Commission on Libraries; Adam B. Hill, Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Council Member; Betsy Russell, The Spokesman-Review; Margaret Hower and Roger Sherman, Idaho Children's Trust Fund; Karen McGee, Office of the Governor; Mary Jones, Infant and Toddler Program, Department of Health and Welfare; Byron Johnson, Idaho Voices for Children; and Fairy Hitchcock, private citizen. Staff present were Maureen Ingram and Charmi Arregui, Legislative Services Office.

The meeting was called to order by **Senator Tom Gannon**, Chairman, at 9:05 a.m.

Senator Gannon introduced **Tom Rane**, **Owen Anderson** and **Mike Godfrey** of the Home and Family Department of BYU-Idaho. They discussed best practices in preparing early childhood educators. **Senator Gannon** asked if there was collaboration between BYU and other colleges in the state in this arena. **Mr. Rane** replied that such collaboration was not formal but was being developed. **Mary Jones** asked the difference between preoperational and concrete teaching methods. **Mike Godfrey** gave a pen's-length example where an older child would recognize that a pen does not change length as the distance changes, but a preoperational child would view a pen as being shorter, the further it is moved away.

Senator Corder asked if they had any advice to reach out to specific groups. **Mr. Godfrey** said that kids are not mini-adults and programs should be structured with that in mind. **Senator Bastian** said that some believe that early childhood education should occur in the home. **Mr. Godfrey** said in a perfect society that would be the case, but that in Idaho sixty percent of moms work outside the home and that early childhood education gives the child the best

opportunity to succeed. **Senator Bastian** asked if there are instances where families can't provide basic education to children? **Mr. Godfrey** said that in impoverished situations, or where the child is developmentally disabled they probably would have a more difficult time. He said that the entire family must be on task for the benefit of the child. **Mr. Godfrey** said in some home environments, the child does not need preschool but that others need it. **Mr. Rane** said a quality prekindergarten will not hurt any child and will benefit many.

Senator Schroeder asked if there are any studies regarding the costs to society of children attending prekindergarten versus those that don't. **Mr. Godfrey** said nationally that for kids at risk, every dollar spent saves seven dollars later on in the form of social and correctional services. **Senator Schroeder** asked if he had the expertise to come up with a figure specific to Idaho. **Mr. Godfrey** said **Steve Barnett** could possibly come up with a number. **Senator Schroeder** said if there was prekindergarten available to all, it might be a way to save Idaho taxpayers a lot of money in the future.

Becky Young asked what is the measuring stick between quality programs? **Mr. Rane** said to have a quality program you must have quality teachers and salaries to support them. **Senator Bastian** asked what makes a high quality program. **Mr. Anderson** said that these programs have good teacher training and a student/teacher ratio of below 9:1 allows a teacher-to-child personal relationship in the classroom. He said that teachers must emphasize a relationship with the whole child before education can begin and that social and emotional development are very important.

Senator Corder asked how many teachers are being trained in early childhood education. **Mr. Rane** said his personal guess is not a lot of teachers are currently being trained in early childhood development. **Senator Bastian** asked if we could assess early childhood education on the basis of criteria or would it be more on a merit-based system. **Mr. Anderson** said they recommend the tailoring of experience unique to the kids they work with.

Senator Bastian asked about Head Start Programs. **Mr. Anderson** said Head Start is established, has all the pieces in place and is of value to helping children learn. **Mr. Anderson** said Head Start is effective because of quality teachers and involved parents.

Senator Gannon asked about Idaho's assessment process and how does that relate to any program. **Mr. Anderson** said in Utah children were assessed with a standard set by the federal government from the top down. He said that some standards were not age appropriate. Any assessment should be ready for kids.

Senator Bastian said he had seen a study where a lot of differences between students who attend Head Start and those who don't tend to even out by the third grade. **Stan Burton** said he felt that study was flawed and if a child is lagging, the child tends to stay behind without remedial help. **Senator Burkett** asked **Mr. Rane** if he were a policymaker, what would be the best investment of dollars. **Mr. Rane** said in his experience the most bang for the buck would occur by beefing up the prekindergarten resources; this is supported by both theory and data.

Senator Schroeder said that **Dr. Bob Barr** has opined something similar.

Tony Wilkerson of the Criminal Justice Commission spoke next and noted that the number one industry in California and the nation right now is corrections. He wishes that business wasn't so brisk. **Mr. Wilkerson** said that **Senator Burkett** had spoken with him about early childhood education and its impact on the criminal justice system. **Senator Schroeder** asked if **Mr. Wilkerson** would come and support prekindergarten programs before the Legislature. **Mr. Wilkerson** said the answer was yes and the Commission will make recommendations.

Senator Schroeder asked if runaway corrections and juvenile corrections budgets could be controlled in the future with more teaching resources at the prekindergarten level. **Mr. Wilkerson** said he has science-based reports that indicate it is a long-term, prudent investment of funds.

Melissa Bandy was the next person to speak and gave the Task Force two handouts which are on file in the Legislative Services Office. In response to questions from **Senator Bastian** and **Senator Burkett**, **Ms. Bandy** said social and emotional growth are important for children to learn but they are very difficult to measure. **Stan Burton** said there is a staggering percentage of parents who did not read to their children, or read to them fairly infrequently, which translates into a lot lower income down the road for the children when they reach adulthood compared to those children who were read to and read with parents. **Mr. Burton** said Head Start serves under 5,000 students in Idaho through grants with 3,000 waiting and 12,000 who are not touched at all.

Senator Schroeder asked if there was a difference for those children who have siblings and those who don't. **Ms. Bandy** said siblings are important. **Mr. Burton** said that children with siblings are statistically less likely to commit crimes. **Senator Burkett** asked if children over age 6 ½ could be brought back on track. **Ms. Bandy** said it is possible but it makes the teacher's role more difficult. She said a kindergarten teacher wants students to sit attentively, ask for help if necessary and be able to take in information. **Senator Burkett** asked about dollars for remediation. **Ms. Bandy** said the system should not leave any child out, but the money would be more effectively spent in prekindergarten than for remediation.

Karen McGee said **Governor Otter** is behind young kids and early education. She said the **Governor** also believes that remediation in the K-12 system is a priority and wants more information as to what is effective. She said the **Governor** wants to invest money in the K-12 system. **Senator Bastian** said that there are a lot of potential programs that could receive state funds. **Ms. Bandy** said the **Governor** indicated he was interested in the best practices and how to partner with communities to encourage early childhood education. **Senator Gannon** asked **Ms. McGee** if the **Governor** would explore this further because it won't just happen in a vacuum.

Representative Thayn spoke regarding the Family Task Force which had met on August

30 and was going to meet again on September 24. He said the purpose of the Task Force is to study the magnitude of the decline of the family since 1950, the effects the decline has had on state social policies, the reasons for the decline, and ways to strengthen the family.

Representative Thayn said that he favors encouraging education in the home for children versus a prekindergarten program and that parents cannot be replaced. He said he favored a \$4,000 annual voucher to parents to assist in-home education. **Senator Gannon** asked if the voucher or grant would be needs based? **Representative Thayn** said that we would need an assessment tool to ensure that the parents and children have done the work successfully, and if so, the parents would receive the money. **Senator Bastian** asked if he said this was an investment in training the parents and **Representative Thayn** said yes.

In responding to questions from **Senator Gannon** and **Senator Burkett**, **Representative Thayn** said that he favors transferring responsibility for children from the state back to the parents. **Representative Thayn** said that disengaged parents are behind problems in society and have lead to the increase in populations of the Department of Correction and the Department of Juvenile Corrections. **Representative Thayn** said that he favors investing in families. The Department of Health and Welfare invests mostly in crises and more needs to be done to strengthen the marriage and family. **Representative Thayn** said he was not favor of a prekindergarten being funded by the state, local school districts or grants from a foundation. He said the cost of government forces moms out of the home.

Senator Bastian asked if **Representative Thayn** favored testing for home school assessment. **Representative Thayn** said yes as long as the state was willing to give the tests. **Mr. Pat Collins** said there are scarce resources available, and there probably aren't enough to create both a prekindergarten system and the system **Representative Thayn** has discussed. **Mr. Collins** said he is trying to envision the level of training needed to create a quality prekindergarten program versus the cost of a parent-based system. **Representative Thayn** said that we need to define what we want. He said a parent needs to be patient, consistent and have time to instruct the child. He said the parent ought to be encouraged as the main teacher of the child.

After lunch the Task Force heard from **Mary Jones** of the Department of Health and Welfare. **Ms. Jones** said that services from the Department are available for targeted families. She said currently there are 3,500 kids in foster care and meth adds to the Department's challenges. **Senator Corder** asked how a child becomes targeted. **Ms. Jones** said that occurs from DHW caseworkers and referrals from schools and hospitals. **Senator Gannon** asked about the cost. **Ms. Jones** said it was approximately \$3,000 per child. **Senator Corder** asked how many of these children have improved or gone backwards? **Ms. Jones** has efficacy studies on file with the Legislative Services Office that measured entering and existing children that evaluate how they are doing.

Senator Schroeder asked what would happen if we gave parents a grant to educate kids in the home prior to school age. **Ms. Jones** said she did not know. **Senator Schroeder** said he would like to have an answer to that question from someone.

Ann Joslin and **Erin Hasler** of the Idaho Commission on Libraries spoke next and gave a PowerPoint presentation and discussed narrative skills, letter knowledge, print awareness, print motivation and phonological awareness. A copy of the presentation is on file in the Legislative Services Office. **Senator Corder** asked if there is consensus on what a child needs to know before going to kindergarten? **Ms. Jones** said there was. **Senator Gannon** asked about children where English is a second language. **Ms. Hasler** said in addition to Spanish speaking children there are many Bosnians in the state. **Ms. Hasler** said socioeconomic factors may contribute to being ready for school as well as a parent's ability to generate enthusiasm for a child to utilize the resources of a library. **Ms. Hasler** said an accelerated reader list is a good way for libraries to partner with schools. She said in certain instances kids get points for things read with a reward down the line for those who excel.

The Task Force then had a round table discussion of "where do we go from here?" **Senator Bastian** said he would really like to hear the State Department of Education's take on early childhood education as well as from the business community. **Senator Bastian** also would like to hear from the **Governor's** office about several issues presented at this meeting. **Senator Bastian** would like to see a presentation from Head Start and from school districts where they have prekindergarten programs, like Wilder or Idaho City.

Senator Schroeder passed out draft legislation RSPAP409 which would allow for prekindergarten programs. The members discussed the wisdom of having federal funds be used to pay for prekindergarten programs. **Senator Bastian** said that early childhood education is occurring now with Head Start, faith-based centers and day cares. He would like to see a voluntary system that uses best practices with an idea that a parent may choose one entity over another and create some competition. **Mr. Burton** liked **Senator Bastian's** idea for more urban areas, but in the more rural areas there may be no choices available.

Senator Gannon discussed the political landscape. He said **Tom Luna** is against early childhood education and didn't bother to send a representative to this meeting. Also, there appears to be a difference of opinion with the House and the **Governor** as well. **Fairy Hitchcock** sees a breakdown in communication between the factions.

Senator Gannon said that for the next meeting the **Superintendent of Public Instruction** will be invited, as well as the **Governor's** office. **Mr. Collins** volunteered to get someone from the business community to attend and address the Task Force.

The Task Force adjourned at 3:50 p.m.